Helen Dunlop and Suzanne Plousos

The Threatened Archaeological Collections Project

Wellington boot excavated from a military latrine at Fort Wellington, Prescott, Ontario.

In 1990, the *Threatened Archaeological Collections Project* (TAC) began as a national initiative recommended by the Heads of Archaeology within the Canadian Parks Service (now Parks Canada). The project was designed to meet our preservation mandate and was further inspired by an evolving awareness of Cultural Resource Management principles. In Ontario Region, the project matured in response to expanded consciousness of CRM philosophy and altered the course in reaction to changing political climates.

Initial work in 1991 determined the scale of national collection problems and made recommendations for improved storage, conservation and conversion of handwritten inventories to electronic systems. During this preliminary stage, some explosives and hazardous materials were encountered in Parks Canada collections. In Ontario, removal of unstable black powder armaments was incorporated into project objectives the following year. An assemblage from Fort Wellington, a 19th-century British military site, assumed priority not only because of black powder concerns, but also due to large amounts of wet organic materials requiring immediate conservation.

The movement within North American cultural institutions to address Aboriginal concerns in the management of archaeological collections, influenced the project in 1992. Work plans were altered to focus on collections with Native human remains in anticipation of re-interment by descendant groups. Assemblages with significant Native components were also emphasized to prepare material of interest to Aboriginal communities in presenting their history and culture.

Visible results of the TAC project occurred in 1993 when the collection was moved to a warehouse with a controlled environment, expanded layout space and increased storage capacity. The facility was also designed to house curatorial collections and a conservation laboratory. That same year, work on archival storage of archaeological records was well underway. But, in the following year, the effects of dwindling fiscal resources were felt within government agencies. Overall government restructuring resulted in shifting the old Canadian Parks Service from the Department of Environment to the new Department of Canadian Heritage. In Ontario Region, archaeology as a distinct section ceased to exist and was incorporated into a multidisciplinary CRM section. Archaeological and curatorial collections staff was amalgamated, and Ontario region and national conservation labs were consolidated in Ottawa. All this had significant impact on the TAC project.

With impending staff reductions and smaller budgets, could continued expenditure on collections be justified? Yes, preservation of cultural resources is integral to Park Canada's mandate. Although short-range funding was reduced, commitment to the project was spread over a longer time period. Despite fewer resources, a CRM approach meant strategic management of collections, not just archival storage of the by-products of archaeological research activities. Site managers, interpretive staff, curators and historians needed to know the value of these resources. Promoting interpretive potential, establishing research and conservation priorities, and improving accessibility became paramount. Collections had to be processed and organized into meaningful tools applied to build a stronger appreciation of Canadian cultural heritage. Artifacts had to be assessed for their historic value and/or associations with commemorated activities, events and/or personages and for their potential to develop new themes, such as cultural landscapes, women's history and ethnicity. The publication of *Guidelines for the Management of Archaeological Resources in the Canadian Park Service* in 1993 was timely. It provided preliminary criteria for evaluating archaeological resources, dividing them into categories of level 1, 2 and "other." Level 1 resources were those directly related to the commemorative intent as designated by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC). These would receive highest priority for preservation and presentation activities. Level 2 resources were defined as having historic value, but were not directly related to the commemorative intent of a national historic site, or were from sites that had not yet been reviewed by the HSMBC. Preliminary

Cornwall collections facility showing the archaeological project layout areas.

criteria for assessing level 2 resources considered archaeological, historical, and material culture contexts. "Other" resources were not deemed to have historical value and would not be managed under CRM policies.

These evaluation criteria had to be applied to a variety of site assemblages from National Parks (NP), National Historic Sites (NHS), and Canals. Ontario sites range from Native archaic to contact period burials, encampments, villages, etc.; late 18th-century fur trade posts; 19th-century British defensive works; canal engineering structures and buildings; logging and fishing camps; Victorian domestic houses, and Prime Ministers' residences. Some assemblages were collected during surveys of large areas, some from salvage monitoring, others were from intensive investigations. Collections sometimes represented single components but were more often from sites with long-term occupations and multi-component features pre and/or post dating the commemorated period. Within these diverse collections were level 1 and level 2 resources: artifacts provocative of the lives of past inhabitants. However, assemblages also contained redundant piles of rusty nails and construction materials, faunal remains, ecofacts, and soil samples many from poor or unknown archaeological contexts. Maintaining and archiving such artifacts was questioned and the impetus for de-accessioning and "right sizing" the collection arose. Thorough documentation, correlating archaeological context to historical phases was required to establish resource level prior to conserving, sampling, and/or de-accessioning.

Three pilot projects addressing evaluation were launched in 1994. The first was Woodside NHS, the boyhood home of William Lyon Mackenzie King, Canada's 10th Prime Minister. A report describing presentation and research potential of the material culture by historical phases was prepared for Woodside. Artifacts associated with the commemorated period were highlighted and shown to have significant influence on King's growth within the material world of Victorian family life. The following year, this report was revised to incorporate ongoing site resource evaluations by the Woodside cultural resource management committee. Resource levels were assigned to the archaeological contexts correlated to historical phases and "other" material was identified for de-assessioning. Artifacts were sent for conservation and a resource collection of level 1 material was initiated for site use.

The second project examined a Laurel burial mound assemblage, ca. AD. 950, associated with Manitou Mounds NHS. Manitou Mounds is a large, significant habitation and ceremonial centre in continuous use from the Archaic to Historic Ojibwa periods. Management of the site involved a partnership between Parks Canada, the Province of Ontario and the Rainy River First Nations Band. Through negotiations, arrangements were made for analysis of the human remains by a MA student at Lakehead University. With Band consent, a representative sample of artifacts, found within the mound, was reproduced for a resource collection. All burial material was re-interred at the site in June 1995 during a ceremony conducted by the Band. The ongoing analytical report describes the material associated with the mound fill and highlights its relevance to the themes and objectives of the NHS.

The third pilot project dealt with assemblages from Pukaskwa NP, excavated or collected during surveys of petroform sites, Blackduck and contact period campsites and historic logging, fishing and trapping sites. A preliminary report correlates the material to historic phases in the Lake Superior Basin and shows the interpretive poten-

Future Prime Minister, "Willy" King (right) grew up at Woodside in a close family environment rich in material expression.

tial of artifacts in demonstrating human adaptation to a changing natural and cultural environment.

In January 1996, in response to internal reorganization and implementation of business practices within government, a business case was prepared for the TAC project. The case provided an option analysis, but highlighted the importance of collection evaluation for effective resource management. The document accentuated interaction between TAC staff and site resource managers. Input into artifact evaluation, report format, and development of site resource collections was encouraged and presentation of results was emphasized.

Fort George, commemorated for its role in the War of 1812, was selected from the regional business plan as an ideal site for collection applications. Upcoming displays were scheduled and upgrades to furnishing plans anticipated. In addition, funding from Parks Canada Headquarters provided an opportunity to consolidate collections from recent archaeological investigations with Fort George material excavated prior to the establishment of Ontario Region. The combined assemblages have greater potential to enhance such themes as: British military presence in the Niagara Peninsula, American occupation of the fort, and Aboriginal involvement in the war. Artifacts may also reflect the activities of women and children within the military community.

Our future aspirations are to continue to expand awareness of the collection as a significant cultural resource and to improve technological applications. In responding to changing issues, the TAC project has remained current and continues to receive support. Indeed, the recent Parks Canada focus on revenue generation is gradually increasing use of artifacts as prototypes for heritage products. Site recognition and use of material culture research to augment presentation programs and develop educational products will remain a major objective. Finally, concern for outmoded and incompatible databases that inhibit collection accessibility and management must be addressed. Upgrading computer systems to meet new technological advances will improve efficiencies and open collections to new and broader audiences: audiences who are intrigued by the meaning and significance of the material realm in understanding the past and in enriching the future.

Helen Dunlop and Suzanne Plousos work in the Collections Section for Professional and Technical Services, Parks Canada, Cornwall, Ontario.

Jennifer F.A. Hamilton

Preserving Archaeological Collections for the Future

The importance of archaeological collections and their associated records to research and the interpretation of the past is well known and documented. These collections represent the total of our physical evidence of human activity at a site, they are non-renewable and thus, the need to ensure their protection is essential for the education of present and future generations.

Since 1991, archaeology staff, Prairie and Northwest Territories Region, Department of Canadian Heritage, Winnipeg have conducted a program of *Threatened Collections Projects* to assess the condition of the artifacts and to upgrade storage conditions to contemporary collections management standards for long-term storage and preservation. This initiative was driven from a larger national study which identified that archaeological excavations conducted by Parks Canada have produced site collections totalling more than 25 million specimens. Of these, it was estimated that less than 1/2 of 1% have been identified for conservation treatment. However, the proportion of a collection which usually requires conservation treatment should be closer to 5%-8% of the collection. This discrepancy was recognized, as was the fact that many of the site collections are over 25 years old and need improvements to their storage and packaging in order to arrest or prevent accelerated deterioration and loss of crucial information. Furthermore, Parks Canada's Cultural Resource Management Policy and the Archaeological Collections Management Directive indicate that artifacts held by Parks Canada and deemed necessary to maintain the integrity of the assemblage must be accorded appropriate collections management and conservation treatments to ensure their continued survival. This study resulted in launching a multi-year project to review all the backlog archaeological collections to address the threats affecting their long-term preservation.

To date, through the Threatened Collections Projects, 50% of the Prairie and Northwest